

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

**Telephone Remarks to the Influenza Preparedness Summit in Bethesda,
Maryland**

July 9, 2009

Well, the—first of all, just let me tell you that everybody is asking about Janet, including President Napolitano here. *[Laughter]* And I'm very appreciative that all of you are there, and my remarks are going to be very brief.

I think it's clear that although we were fortunate not to see a more serious situation in the spring when we first got news of this outbreak, that the potential for a significant outbreak in the fall is looming. And Kathleen, Janet, John Brennan, Arne Duncan, and our entire team have tried to engage in the most rigorous planning exercise to make sure that anything that may occur in the fall, we're prepared for.

And so I won't go through the details of this. I'm sure that Kathleen and Janet and others have laid out what the potential consequences are of a renewed outbreak of H1N1. We want to make sure that we are not promoting panic, but we are promoting vigilance and preparation. And the most important thing for us to do in this process is to make sure that State and local officials prepare now to implement a vaccination program in the fall, but also that they are working on an overall public communications campaign with the White House and the possibilities that we may need to be dealing with schools that are seeing significant outbreaks of H1N1.

And we've looked at past cases of this being properly handled and situations like this being improperly handled, and one of the most important differences is where it's well handled, State and local officials have complete ownership over this issue. They are providing good ideas to the Federal Government; they are critical links to inform us what's working and what's not.

And so I'm just very grateful that all of you are taking this seriously. We may end up averting a crisis. That's our hope. But I think that if we are all working together in a thoughtful, systematic way based on the best science possible, that even if this turns out to be a serious situation, we can mitigate the damage and protect our neighbors and our friends and coworkers.

So again, my main message to you is to say thank you. You are working with a outstanding team in Kathleen, Janet, Arne, and John. And if there are any issues at all that you think we have not raised, any T's we have not crossed or I's that we have not dotted, that affect either our general approach or your specific community, please let us know. We don't want to find out after the fact that there's some things that we could have done better. We want to find out now and make sure that we're planning ahead.

So, Kathleen, good job as always, and I want you to know that in conversations with world leaders about this issue, what's clear is, is that we are way ahead in terms of our planning. And in fact, we may need to provide some guidance and direction to other public health officials in other countries who may not have done such excellent preparation as you have done.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:30 p.m. from L'Aquila, Italy, to summit participants at the National Institutes of Health. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of Homeland Security Janet A. Napolitano; President Giorgio Napolitano of Italy; Secretary of Health and Human

Services Kathleen Sebelius; Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism John O. Brennan; and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included remarks by Secretary Sebelius.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Influenza preparedness summit in Bethesda, MD, telephone remarks.

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Names: Brennan, John O.; Duncan, Arne; Napolitano, Giorgio; Napolitano, Janet A.; Sebelius, Kathleen.

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